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ABSTRACT

Provided to teachers are guidelines for structuring a school-age child care program and a list of appropriate activities for after-school care. Discussion covers attendance taking, transition times, group games, art activities, and staggered dismissal. Supplemental activities are suggested, and outlines of a typical school day with child care, and a typical after-school day are provided. Concluding comments concern needs for flexibility and staff training, and desired characteristics of school-age child care teachers. Listed activities include quiet table and small group games, creative group activities, trips, dramas, indoor gym, and outdoor and club activities. (RH)

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Working With the School Age Child: Activities to enrich your school age child care program

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Abstract

"Working With the School Age Child: Activities to enrich your school age child care program" is designed as a hands-on lesson for teachers and directors. The latchkey phenomenon is growing in our society and, as a result, there is a growing need for quality school age child care. This paper explains how to structure a typical school age child care program, and what special activities you can do with the children throughout the year.

Working With the School Age Child: Activities to enrich your school age child care program

School age child care programs, sometimes referred to as latchkey programs, are a growing phenomenon in our society. As more parents go to work, the need for quality after-school care increases. Training programs for elementary education teachers usually do not include lessons on after-school activities or how to structure a 3-6 p.m. program. Likewise, early childhood teacher classes at colleges seldom provide information about children age 9 and older, let alone what to do with them in a school age child care (SACC) program. The purpose of this article is to help the teacher who may be hired to teach, assist or organize an after-school program.

The teacher needs to know how to schedule a typical structured SACC environment. "Structured environment" means organized, not rigid. The school age child has been in a confined, highly structured environment from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; he or she does not need more of the same. But these children do need to feel that there is some organization to their afternoon. This umbrella structure will make them feel more secure (Bender, 1984).

The school age child may start the day as early as

7 a.m. in a before school program. If the child has not eaten breakfast at home, the first meal may be eaten at school. The breakfast can be part of a meal plan, or it can be packed from home.

Quiet, relaxing activities, such as reading, free-style art materials, and music should be made available to the children. The goal is to establish an environment that allows the child to prepare for the school day.

Children who attend an afternoon kindergarten will be in child care in the morning session. This can be a continuance of art, music and play activities, or it can be enrichment or remediation program. The older child (first grade and higher) will attend classes from approximately 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. A mid-day lunch will be provided by the school or center, or can be packed from home. Field, playground, or indoor gym activities are recommended after lunch. Kindergartners will now attend the afternoon session at their school or center. The children that were in the morning kindergarten will go to child care after lunch. This is the same as previously described.

It is important to note that child care arrangements can be made in schools, child care centers, Y's, or in home provider care. Another point to mention is that some schools provide a full day kindergarten. Full day

kindergartens eliminate the need for an additional transition for the child. A period of time for rest should be provided after lunch for these young children.

The typical after school day is usually three hours, from 3-6 p.m. Sometimes there are early dismissal days, from 12:30-6 p.m.; then a movie or special project helps to pass the longer day. The first thing you want to do is make sure that everyone has arrived. After all, the safety of the children is one of the main goals of a SACC program.

After attendance, the children need to let off steam. They must have the opportunity to go into the playground or indoor gym, to run, jump, scream, talk, and engage in gross motor activities. This is the 3 p.m. explosion! After they have had sufficient time to play (outdoors preferably), they can come back to your home base and have a nutritious snack. Snack time is a good time to teach children about good health and nutrition. Chocolate bars are not recommended, unless you want to spend the afternoon dealing with an over-active child.

The next transition is a quiet time. Children may now do individual table projects, such as homework, solitaire-type card games, playdough, etc. Parents often request that their children have their homework done before dismissal time, because of the late hour at which they arrive home.

Some children need to relax during their quiet time--or throughout the whole afternoon. Soft beanbag-type pillows should be available for the children. A child might have allergies, or not feel well that day, and may also need to rest. Your cushions should be of vinyl-type materials that can be sanitized each day.

The children are now ready for group games. Blackboard games, such as hangman, are popular. Small relay races, played with items held on a spoon traveling across the room, also lend themselves to classroom group activities. Table games, such a Monopoly Candyland and Stratego, are popular with schoolagers. Manipulatives, such as Legos, can be enjoyed by all ages. These sets increase in difficulty, based on a child's age, which is marked on the boxes. The Space and Castle sets are wonderful for older boys. Another manipulative is a set of dominoes. Dominoes can be played in two ways--the traditional way, by matching dots or pictures; or the stack-and-set-up way, where the challenge is to create rows and then push them down in a synchronized falling pattern (Cohn, 1986).

An integral feature of any after-school program is the availability of art materials. Art can be a planned activity or a free-style art event. There should always be plenty of assorted media and materials for the children to

choose from each day. Paper, markers, scissors and glue are expendables that should be replaced immediately when supplies run low. Be aware of the developmental difference between younger and older children when planning art projects. Younger children, in kindergarten and first grade, prefer projects that can be completed in one day. Older children, in grades 2-6, enjoy what I call developmental continuance projects. These are projects that might take all week to finish. An example of this is the Hawaiian travelogue mural described on page 9.

The final activity of the day is dismissal. Dismissal is a staggered process throughout the afternoon until 6 p.m. Keep track of your children through the use of a sign out sheet so that each child exits with the correct, responsible adult. Again, safety is crucial to the program. An outline of the described SACC schedule is summarized on page 8. To add spice and variety to your ten-month program, you might try some of the following alternative activities. Don't try to include all of these activities in one year. You don't want to overstimulate your students, or tax your budget beyond its limits. But these are fun activities that do help break up the winter months.

A. Summary Outline of a Typical School Day with Child Care

1. Attendance
2. Breakfast
3. Relaxing Activities
4. School Classes or child Care (p.m. K)
5. Lunch
6. Free play time
7. School Classes, Child Care (a.m.), or rest (full day)
8. Dismissal
9. After school program

B. Summary Outline of a Typical After School Day

1. Attendance
2. Playground or In-door Gym

   Supplemental Activity
3. Snack
4. Quiet Time
   a. Homework
   b. Table games - individual
   c. Arts and crafts
   d. Relaxation
   e. Book corner
5. Group Games & toys

   Supplemental Activity
6. Art-Free Style or Planned
7. Dismissal--Staggered

A common question that often is asked is: "What do you do on a snowy day?" The answer is, "Get them out!" Send a note home to parents saying: "Tomorrow we'll have a snow-play day, and please pack a change of clothes." After they have played in the snow, they can change in the bathroom.

Indoor gym activities and games can take place all year round. Tag, dodge ball and relays using large motor skills are common games. Also, a personal favorite is a N.Y.C. street game: hit the popsicle stick with the pink ball. Two children play opposite each other, about 6 feet apart, and try to hit the popsicle stick (or coin) placed on the floor, with a pink ball. Points are awarded for each hit; double for flip-overs.

Other supplemental activities include drama. The children can use written plays, or they can write their own. Improvisations are fun and creative, too. A creative drama activity is the travelogue. The children pick a geographic place, like Hawaii, and combine art and drama in creating scenes. Murals, dances, music, etc., combine to make for a wonderful week-long (or longer) project. (Zavitkowsky, 1983).

Another creative activity that's fun in the winter (in cold climate areas) is skiing. Yes, skiing! School playgrounds, with their grass covered foundations, provide wonderful conditions for cross-country skiing. Contact a local sports shop and ask them to donate free equipment and lessons, which they might be willing to do at least one

time. Think of this experience as a field trip or special event. The children and the parents will be talking about it for months.

Try to use your community merchants to expand your after school activities. Besides the sports shop, try the bike repair place, too. The proprietor might want to teach a bike repair course one time a week for a month. In return, you offer to distribute his or her business cards to the families. The bike repair shop gets free advertising and you get another activity for your program; not a bad deal, fun and a good deed too.

Cooking is both fun and an edible activity. A toaster over and a blender are good tools to have on hand, especially when a regular oven is not available. Other activities include aerobics and karate, taught in the indoor gym. No special clothing is needed, just sweatpants.

Consider starting a (boy or girl) scout troop, or a Young Astronauts chapter. Information on starting a Young Astronauts chapter can be found by writing to the Young Astronauts Council in Washington, D.C. While we are into space, why not ask your local science teacher if she or he knows who can teach a rocketry course. It can be a fun two-week course that culminates in exciting launches. (Caution: the rocketry teacher must have a permit to launch rockets.)

Regarding the community again, don't forget to take walking field trips. Visit your local print shop and ask for a tour. Hospitals often give guided tours to school age

children; call for an appointment first. Dining out in a neighborhood restaurant is also a nice break in routine. A favorite field trip in the community occurs during Halloween. Latchkey children often miss going trick-or-treating because it is too late by the time their mothers or fathers come home from work. Try going trick-or-treating as a group field trip. Have the children change into their costumes after school and canvass the neighborhood before dark. Don't forget to get signed trip consent forms from the parents for each trip (Cohn, 1986).

An ambitious suggestion is an activity that teaches economics. The children can go into business for themselves. Set up a fruit stand or a candy shop. Purchase goods in quantity at wholesale prices and sell them at retail prices. The children will have made a profit. In addition, they learn ordering and purchasing skills, business management, public relations and profit sharing. At the end of each business quarter, they can have a party or purchase new games and equipment for the program. The teachers must be aware that this program represents a lot of work for the children, as well as for the adults. The teacher is usually the one who has to pick up the goods and who oversees the money. But the educational benefits of this project are countless (Grolnic, 1985). A list of additional activities and games can be found on page 13.

Some closing words concerning after-school programs. A good survival tip is that you must be flexible! Remember

that even the best planned activity might have to be changed. Be prepared with a back-up plan (Baden, Genser, Levine & Seligson, 1982). Also, don't be insulted if nobody wants to do your art project. Save that idea for a rainy day. Keep in mind that dismissal is staggered, which means that the best activity might be interrupted when a child has to go home. Always have enough materials and games on hand, so children are not waiting a long time to share things. When closing up, always put the room back the way you found it on arrival. This is crucial for good relations with the daytime staff.

Staff training for professional growth is crucial to any good child care program. Outside consultants can be invited to your program to conduct workshops. Many colleges and social service agencies also offer training seminars. Program and staff evaluations are also necessary for quality in school age child care. Assessments can be made by teachers, directors, parents, and even children served by the program (Cohn, 1989).

School age child care teachers must be caring professionals, sensitive to the needs of the modern working family. A quality SACC program does not simply maintain children, merely to prevent them from being home alone after school, but provides developmentally appropriate activities to meet their needs.

ACTIVITIES AND GAMES

Quiet Table Games & Activities
solitaire/other card games
drawing/individual art
reading
resting
homework
playdough

Small Group Games & Activities
rap sessions
water play
dot-to-dot drawings & game
art
jacks
Monopoly
Candyland
Stratego
chess
checkers
chinese checkers
manipulative
legoes (space, castle sets, others)
lincoln logs
dominoes
music center
cooking

Creative Group Activities
scavenger hunt
story telling
pass-a-face
thumb wrestling
room mazes/obstacle course
thumbs-up game
pretend tug-o-war (Gregson, 1982)
musical chairs
the store: group enterprise venture

Trips
bike repair shop
babysitting course
Halloween parade
local hospital tour
local restaurant tour
print shop
local gas station-mechanics tour

Drama
travelogue
playlets
improvisations
puppetry
multicultural events

Indoor Gym Space
tag
scooters
dodgeball
basketball/volleyball
relay races
spud
red light, green light
hoola hoops
through the koop game
hit popstick/pink ball
karate
hockey
jump rope
aerobics

Outdoors
snow play days
cross country skiing
playground free play
kick-ball
ropes
hopscotch
baseball
basketball
soccer/football
relays/tag
hockey

Clubs
bowling
boy/girl scouts
collectables:
(cards/bottle caps)
Young Astronauts Program
Rocketry
4-H
cooking
sewing
art

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